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ABSTRACT

This study of 22 preschool classrooms examined differential interaction patterns of 11 compensatory education teachers toward students who were members of ethnic or racial majorities or minorities in their classes. A group was considered to be a class minority if it constituted less than 30 percent of the class. The study was designed to determine the extent to which compensatory preschool teachers used aggressive, restrictive, or positive and neutral behaviors to control children. Verbal and nonverbal interaction data were collected with a modified version of Soar, Soar and Ragosta's (1973) Florida Climate and Control System instrument during circle time and free activity periods. Analyses focused on six groups: white males, white females, black males, black females, other minority males, and other minority females. Findings indicated that classroom minority blacks and whites received disproportionate amounts of control behaviors in comparison to their majority group peers. The disproportionate responses were positive or neutral. Analysis was extended by examinations of classes that were more racially balanced than the 22 classes first studied. Teachers' control behaviors in balanced classes did not show the pattern evident in the racially imbalanced classes. Discussion focuses on factors that may influence teachers' differential treatment of class majorities and minorities. (RH)

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Compensatory Preschool Teachers' Interaction Patterns With the Classroom Minority

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INTERACTION WITH CLASSROOM MINORITY

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Abstract

This descriptive, naturalistic classroom study of teacher-student interaction examined the interaction patterns of compensatory preschool teachers when controlling the behavior of black and white males and females, classroom numerical minorities, who made up less than 30 percent of the classroom enrollment. Interactions were collected using a modified version of Soar, Soar and Ragosta's Florida Climate and Control System observation instrument. Classroom minority blacks and whites were found to receive disproportionate amounts of control behaviors when compared to their majority group peers. These disproportionate responses were, overall, positive/neutral in type.

Much of the study of teacher-student interaction on the preschool level has dealt with teacher contact through instruction and/or discipline. Past research in the latter area have presented data showing that patterns of preschool pupil control interactions may be influenced by basic assumptions that relate to sex, cultural, socioeconomic, and racial differences. Much of the interaction between teacher and student occurs in the attempts of the former to control/manage the classroom (Brophy & Evertson, 1983; Brophy & Good, 1970, 1974; Cherry, 1975; Martin, 1972). For this reason the focus of the present research was on the interaction patterns of the observed compensatory teachers as they attempted to control pupil behavior. The research presented here was a part of a larger study in which the verbal and nonverbal interaction patterns of compensatory preschool teachers were observed in naturalistic settings.

Much of the research on preschool dyadic interaction patterns is from University based facilities (Honig & Wittmer, 1982). Particularly, we are in need of information on this topic that inform of the occurrences in community based preschool settings that are serving the lower-income pupil, who we understand may experience interaction patterns that are different from those of middle- and upper-income pupils (Brophy & Good, 1972; Quay & Jarrett, 1986).

To date, there exists a paucity of research data that relate teacher-student interaction when the latter is in a

minority numerically in the observed classroom enrollment. Available research data suggest that there is a strong likelihood that preschool males will receive proportionally more interaction with the teacher in instruction and discipline (Honig & Wittmer, 1982; Nelson, 1987; Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, and Tonick, 1973). The work of Honig and Wittmer (1982) and Quay and Jarrett (1986) suggested that interactions of teachers with their low-income pupils are more negative for males than females, and in the latter study, pupils received fewer interactions of any type than middle-income pupils. The availability of data on teacher interaction patterns when controlling behavior of pupils, black and white, males and females, who are numerically less than 30 percent of the class enrollment is sparse.

The focus of this research was on the control behaviors used by the observed teachers to control pupil behavior. Observation was to determine to what extent aggressive, restrictive, and/or positive/neutral control behaviors were used by the observed compensatory teachers. The research question was: Are there differences in compensatory preschool teachers' interaction patterns according to the children's race/ethnicity and gender in the use of verbal and nonverbal behaviors that (a) restrict activity, (b) that are aggressive toward the student, and (c) that are positive/neutral in type? The purpose of the research was to assess, in greater detail than has previously been done, the interaction patterns of the compensatory teachers when

controlling the behavior of racially different males and females.

Method

Subjects

The results of the research reported here are part of data from a larger study of 11 compensatory preschool teachers. The teachers were white female volunteers in an urban compensatory preschool program. Each teacher had two classes, a morning and an afternoon group. Therefore, 22 classes were observed.

Procedure

A time-sampling observational approach was used which focused on the teacher as the target of the observation. Circle time and free activity periods, 10-20 minutes and 45-60 minutes respectively, were the observed portions of the preschool school day. Each period was broken into segments of two-minutes of recording the data on the Florida Climate and Control System (FLACCS) observation instrument (Soar, Soar, and Ragosta, 1973). This rotation of observing and recording was repeated for the length of the observation period. In instances in which the teacher did not exhibit a control behavior during the two minutes of observation, a FLACCS form was coded with the pertinent information (nature of the structure, teacher, etc.). Data were gathered over a period of seven weeks during the fall of the school year.

Five observers participated in the data collection. The

interobserver reliability was done twice -- before the data gathering began, and three-fourths of the way through the process. The first reliability averaged 95 percent for all items across all observers. The second averaged 96 percent for all items across all observers.

Analysis

Each teachers' morning and afternoon observational findings were initially compared and found to show quite different patterns in most instances. It was therefore determined that further analyses would be more productive if aligned according to classroom composition.

Pupils observed in interaction dyads with teachers formed six groups: (a) white males, (b) white females, (c) black males, (d) black females, (e) other minority males, and (f) other minority females. Groups E and F were made up of Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Asian Americans. The control categories on the Florida Climate and Control System observation instrument included verbal and nonverbal positive/neutral, aggressive, and restrictive control behaviors.

In order to analyze what control behaviors were proportionally exhibited to pupils of different race and sex in the control process, two sets of percentages were calculated for each child observed in an interaction dyad. The first type of percentage calculated showed the proportion of the total enrollment in the classroom constituted by those of the same race

and sex as the child in the interaction dyad. The second type of percentage calculated showed the proportion of control interactions recorded for the child in each of the several different control categories. Further, the relationship between the enrollment proportion of each pupil group and the percent of control behaviors received was represented by an index number. This index was created by dividing the percent of the control behaviors by the percent of the class enrollment.

Results

Classrooms that had pupil populations with a racial group (black or white) comprising less than 30 percent of the total enrollment showed teacher interaction with the racial minority disproportionate to that of his/her majority peers. The mean scores for index numbers representing distribution of control behaviors by race and sex in the 70-30 ratio classrooms suggested that disproportionate interactions by race did occur. For both males and females, when blacks and other minorities dominated, whites tended to receive proportionately more control interaction than blacks. For both males and females, when whites dominated the enrollment, blacks tended to receive proportionately more control interaction than whites.

Individual analysis of the classrooms was done for groups of males and females as earlier preschool interaction study data indicate that males and females may receive differential patterns

of interaction. Table 1 presents the means for index numbers representing proportions of control behaviors received by females according to race. For the 22 classrooms in the study, there were 5 classes which met the criterion of predominately black or white (70-30 ratio) and had females enrolled of both races. Of these, 4 classes were predominately black, and in each of these classes, the minority group whites received a proportionately larger share of the teacher control behaviors than blacks. In the one predominately white class, a single black female was the recipient of more control behaviors than her white female peers.

Table 2 presents the means for index numbers representing proportions of control behaviors received by males according to race. There were 7 classrooms which met the criterion for being predominately black or white. Of these 7 classes, 4 were predominately black in pupil composition and 3 classes were predominately white. In the 4 predominately black classes, white males did receive proportionately greater shares of teacher control behaviors. In one of the 3 predominately white classrooms, a single black male received a disproportionate share of the teacher directed control behaviors. In the remaining two classrooms, the majority white males received proportionate shares of teacher control behaviors in comparison to their black counterparts.

It was not true in every case, but the general picture that

Table 1

Comparisons of Classrooms by Female Composition on Proportions of Control Behaviors Received by Black Versus White Pupils

Classrooms	B to W Ratio	% of Predominant Group	Index Means of Control Behaviors Received	
			Blacks	Whites
Predominately Black				
Classroom A AM	6 to 2	79	1.05	1.08
Classroom J PM		93	no white	
Classroom T PM	7 to 1	89	.51	.80
Classroom U AM	6 to 2	78	.30	1.36
Classroom V PM	10 to 1	83	1.00	1.67
Predominately White				
Classroom D PM		94	no black	
Classroom M AM		73	no black	
Classroom R PM	1 to 5	72	2.57	.39
Black and White				
Classroom B PM	3 to 3	53W	.44	1.17
Classroom G AM	7 to 4	67B	.56	.27
Classroom K AM	2 to 2	63B	.13	.00
Classroom L PM	7 to 5	63B	.93	.43
Classroom N PM	1 to 5	64W	2.57	.39
Classroom O AM	1 to 4	38W	3.88	.00
Classroom P PM		46	no black	
Classroom Q AM	2 to 6	50W	2.25	.45
Classroom S AM	5 to 2	56B	.53	1.00
Totally Black or Totally White				
Classroom C AM		100	no black	
Classroom E AM		100	no white	
Classroom F PM		100	no white	
Classroom H PM		100	no white	
Classroom I AM		100	no white	

Note. B represents Black and W represents White

Table 2

Comparisons of Classrooms by Male Composition on Proportions of Control Behaviors Received by Black Versus White Pupils

Classrooms	B to W Ratio	% of Predominant Group	Index Means of Control Behaviors Received	
			Blacks	Whites
Predominately Black				
Classroom A AM	5 to 1	79	.42	4.40
Classroom J PM	10 to 1	93	.59	5.00
Classroom T PM	10 to 1	89	1.30	1.40
Classroom U AM		78	no white	
Classroom V PM	5 to 1	83	.92	1.70
Predominately White				
Classroom D PM	1 to 8	94	.83	1.55
Classroom H AM	1 to 3	73	.00	1.65
Classroom R PM	1 to 8	72	5.50	.52
Black and White				
Classroom B PM	5 to 6	53W	2.14	.23
Classroom G AM	5 to 2	67B	1.57	2.45
Classroom K AM	8 to 4	63B	.82	1.76
Classroom L PM	3 to 1	63B	2.16	1.33
Classroom N PM	1 to 3	64W	.00	1.65
Classroom O AM	2 to 1	38W	3.53	.00
Classroom P PM	3 to 4	46W	2.70	.61
Classroom Q AM		50W	no black	
Classroom S AM	4 to 2	56B	2.23	1.25
Totally Black or Totally White				
Classroom C AM		100	no black	
Classroom E AM		100	no white	
Classroom F PM		100	no white	
Classroom H PM		100	no white	
Classroom I AM		100	no white	

Note. B represents Black and W represents White

emerged is that when black children were the classroom majority, white children tended to receive disproportionate amounts of control behaviors from the observed teachers. When white children were the classroom majority, black children tended to be the recipients of disproportionate amounts of teacher directed control behaviors. The indications are that classroom minorities in a numerical sense in the observed classrooms, whether black or white, tended to be treated differently by their teachers on the dimension of control.

To test this theory further, the analysis was extended by examining the remainder of the classes which had a racially mixed enrollment with a more equitable majority-minority composition. There were nine such classes. The directional findings of the predominately black or white classrooms were not found for these more racially balanced classrooms.

Discussion

The pupil in the compensatory preschool is not the typical 3-, 4-, or 5-year-old. Family economic background for the average compensatory preschooler is generally that of low-income status. Differential treatment of racial groups in the classroom setting is probably focused on least in the preschool setting when such research is undertaken. Given the low economic background of the pupils in the observed classrooms and our knowledge of the likelihood of differential interaction patterns in this setting,

this descriptive research having focused on the former factor is informative for a variety of reasons.

The ultimate goal of education on any level is the self-sufficiency of the pupil at adulthood. The years prior to this provide ample time in which a variety of experiences necessary to this goal are employed by nurturing, informed, and determined teachers. We know that dyadic interactions are among the means by which these experiences are accommodated in preschool settings. Yet, the available research in preschool and primary teacher-student interaction report that equal and equitable opportunity in the dyadic state is not experienced by all.

According to several research reports on teacher-student interaction, teachers may be unaware of their interaction patterns (Good & Brophy, 1973; Martin & Keller, 1976; Ryan & Moffitt, 1974). This suggests that some teachers may be unaware of the differential treatment given in their classrooms. This makes it more imperative that research focused on teacher-student interaction continues to occur so that data on classroom interaction are available. Discussion here will look at a variety of possibilities that may influence the differential treatment of pupils reported here and in earlier research.

There is no previous research for comparison on the compensatory preschool level that has dealt specifically with teacher interaction and classroom numerical minority. A discussion of rationales for the differential treatment findings

in this study includes insightful information from teacher expectation and attitudes research. A variety of research reports provide bases for drawing conclusions that may account for the occurrences in the observed classrooms of this study. The work of Willis and Brophy (1974) on teachers' attitudes suggested that their preschool subjects were reacting to differences in pupil compliance and misbehavior when dealing with groups of children for whom they felt concern or rejection. Additionally, Bondy, Norcross, and Constantino (1982) issued possibilities that also may be feasible in this instance. The authors noted that preschool teachers, unlike grade school teachers, do not have access to a wide variety of objective information about their students' abilities. The authors reported that it is not unreasonable to expect the preschool or day-care teacher to be relatively more influenced by non-academic factors such as sex of the child and teacher estimates of the sociability and likability of the child. Additionally, social class and physical attractiveness are variables that Bourdeau and Ryan (1978) discussed in their research on preschool teachers' expectations and attitudes as having affected teacher-student interaction patterns.

These research studies provide a number of variables to explore in trying to account for the present findings. I think it imperative to focus on explication for the reported occurrences as it allows for the suggestion of means by which

such behavior may be altered, a step for future research. The differential treatment noted here may have resulted as a response to race or behavior. The types of pupil behavior to which the teachers were responding in the study was much the same in each observed classroom and across pupil groups. The reported differential interaction with black and white males and females who were numerical minorities in the classroom enrollment may be a result of a teacher's response to race. If race was a factor in the differential treatment, the postulation of Willis and Brophy (1974) may be in effect. The teachers observed may not have been responding to behaviors that were different in the black and white pupils; they may have responded to preconceived attitudes that white children should interact differently from what was observed in the classroom setting. Thereby, the white teachers in the predominately black classroom may have attempted to change white pupils' behaviors through the use of disproportionate amounts of control behaviors. Moreover, the latter idea may be supported by the work of Bourdeau and Ryan (1978) who found that males received more disciplinary contacts when they were held with the teachers' high concern or rejection attitudes.

In accounting for the disproportionate amounts of control behaviors experienced by the black pupils in majority white classrooms, a different premise may be in effect. Teachers may have responded to black pupil behavior, evaluating it based on

their own cultural background. Eugene Pernell (1983) has suggested that this may in fact occur. The teachers in this study were white middle class females and generally had cultural backgrounds different from that of their pupils. Cultural differences may have influenced expectations for pupil behavior. The Bourdeau and Ryan (1978) supposition of teacher felt high concern or rejection attitudes for the black pupil may have had some affect on the teacher's interaction patterns.

These conceivable explanations are presented with a caveat. They are not based on primary research data. But they provide means for rationalizing the reported occurrences. If teachers are unaware oftentimes of their interaction patterns, as some research suggests, it is exigent that steps be taken to alter this behavior. In attempting to do so, suitable training in the preparation stages may help to transmute differential treatment. Additional studies of this type are needed which may impact upon the present findings. It is the responsibility of early childhood preparation in-service preschool programs to address findings of this nature. Teacher unawareness of interaction patterns will never be altered if steps are not taken to change awareness and preconceived attitudes through information and experience. This is not a difficult task but requires the efforts of all in a teacher preparation program so that the curriculum addresses a variety of interaction issues. In the day-care center, nursery school, or prekindergarten the early childhood educator should be

continually challenged to examine interaction patterns through in-service and self-evaluation. All of these are possible, it merely takes commitment for implementation. Insuring equal and equitable interaction for pupils in preschool settings requires the concerted effort of those involved in training and implementation.

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